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ABSTRACT

An instructor recently concluded that the students (rural mountain, white) that she teaches at Pikeville College, Kentucky, (population 6,500) have a part in multiculturalism; consequently, multiculturalism has become part of the classroom agenda. There are four steps in the curriculum. First, stereotypes and dialectical differences of Appalachia are considered. Students are asked to look at common examples of outsiders who stereotype the people of Appalachia; then students recall times when they themselves have been stereotyped or ridiculed; and finally, the students examine some of the positive attributes of the Appalachia area. Second, the students study the origin of their linguistic background and distinguish dialect problems from general illiteracy. With the instructor the students discuss what Appalachia English (AE) is, as defined by researchers. They also consider the power of the metaphors prevalent in their vernacular. Third, students reflect on the ways to deal with being outside the standard. Dialogue centers on the choices a person makes, for example, when wearing a dress to church and jeans to McDonalds. Fourth, students are helped to build confidence and pride in expressing themselves in their writing. Since many in the class are underprepared for writing, the conversation is about how writers offer varying experiences to their audiences and how the power to make a difference in their lives resides within each student. (Contains 10 references.) (TB)

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RURAL WHITES: A PART OF MULTICULTURALISM?

PRESENTED BY
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TO THE CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE COMMUNICATION AND COMPOSITION
MARCH 1994 NASHVILLE, TN

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I. INTRODUCTION

My purpose today is to narrate the story of how I have concluded that the Appalachian students I teach have a part in multiculturalism.

For many years, I have read in composition journals about multiculturalism, feeling like the maid at the country club excluded from membership. Certainly I cannot argue with it, for I believe we are a diverse nation which has for too long thought of itself as mono-cultural. In fact, I like the metaphor of our nation as a stew pot. Victor Villanueva, a Latino professor of Rhetoric at Northern Arizona University, describes the stew pot as one that:

> maintains the violence of the melting-pot metaphor while suggesting that some of the ingredients do not lose all of their original identity, though altered, taking in the juices from the other ingredients of the pot, adding to the juices; all of us...Americans, and all of us some things else. (20)

According to a recent New York Times Education supplement, multiculturalism for some means "enriching the curriculum by exposing students to many voices and different value systems...[speaking about] melting pot theories, a benign look at people working together"(Mills 19). In contrast, Georgetown University's James F. Slevin, English Department chair, argues that "referring to multiculturalism as diversity sanitizes the power issues...another perspective is to look at the richness of men and women, whites and others, with an eye to power relationships between them"(quoted in Mills 20). Most multicultural references, however, ignore the significant minority population that I teach--the rural mountain white--which is why I felt excluded.

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II. COMMUNITY/STUDENT PROFILE

I have lived for 19 years in Eastern Kentucky and taught

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English composition for ten years for two institutions (Prestonsburg Community College and Pikeville College) situated in the geographic center of central Appalachia. The main industry, coal mining, fluctuates between boom and bust cycles resulting in a unstable economy. Twenty-five percent of the population live below the national poverty level. Unemployment is high: 13% compared with a state average of 6.7%; underemployment is common. Fifty-five percent of the population count on welfare for their subsistence. Poorly funded schools do not prepare economically deprived students well, encouraging many to drop out of school. About 49 percent go on to college, but many high school graduates habitually rank low on standardized tests, requiring them to take developmental classes entering college.

Steep mountains, rugged terrain, and poor highways have isolated the mountains, accounting for poor economic development and reinforcing traditional ways. Although highways are opening up the area, it is still difficult to reach with the nearest airports being two to three hours away and no bus or train service.

For most of my students, coming to college in Pikeville (population 6500) is coming from Greasy Creek or Ford's Branch to the big city, and although their families value education, they do not want their children staying in the dormitories, so many continue to live at home and commute. One of my developmental students, Christy, recently told me about the traumatic decision she made to stay in the dorm this semester and how unhappy her parents are. Non-traditional students--divorced men and women, disabled miners, and other blue collar workers--enroll in classes because they are unemployed, head single family households, or need to be retrained. More than 72 percent of our freshmen receive financial aid. Demographically, we have less than one percent African-Americans, two percent Hispanic. We have virtually no people of color. If color is a way to gain membership in the multicultural community, then my students wouldn't qualify.

III. THEORY

To clear up my confusion about membership, I again consulted Victor Villanueva. He notes in Bootstraps: An Academic of Color similarities between race and class that would include my students. William Grabe, linguist and editor of the Journal of Applied Linguistics asserts that Appalachian students have problems similar to people of

color: a distinct dialect much removed from the standard and an essentially oral culture, both of which are subject to social stigma. They also share problems of a non-mainstream culture: poor educational opportunities, high unemployment, and low self-concept. Recognizing these conditions, Anthony Petrosky and David Bartholomae in the English Department at the University of Pittsburgh gear their composition work to transient Appalachian students.

Then I read about Cincinnati, where in November, Appalachians were declared a minority by the Human Rights Commission based on an 80% high school dropout rate and discrimination in housing and employment. So I became convinced that with a stigmatized dialect, essentially oral culture, low self-concept, reliance on government subsidy, high unemployment, and geographic isolation, my students definitely fit into the multicultural community.

IV. CLASSROOM PEDAGOGY

Once I had a clue I could join in the conversation, I started to see how I could use my current teaching practices to show my students their part in the total multicultural picture.

The practices I use to convey this picture are:

1. considering stereotypes and dialectical differences of this area;
2. studying the origin of their linguistical background and distinguishing dialect problems from general illiteracy;
3. reflecting on ways to deal with being outside the standard; and
4. building up confidence in expressing themselves in their writing.

A. CLARIFYING STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes have plagued this area since it was settled in the 1800's. In the past, outsiders have romanticized the area as the last bastion of white Anglo-Saxon purity and home of mountain crafts and bluegrass music. In contrast, this past year "The Kentucky Cycle" appeared on Broadway for a short while, and although the playwright was describing his family's personal experience, the play reinforced the stereotype of violence and ignorance "inherent" in our area. Most recently our area has been the center of publicity because a local FBI agent murdered one of his informants. In

Above Suspicion, a book about the murder, author Joe Sharkey reinforces other misconceptions about the area: "In the rural areas out of town, grown men still go barefoot in the summer; the dole is a way of life; the teenage pregnancy rate is among the highest in the country; feuds simmer over generations like stew pots"(16). Within the last month, the AP picked up the story about a local woman who had a vision from God that Pikeville would be the scene of an earthquake on March 6. The media characterizes the whole area based on a few incidents, insinuating that this is the only place where such things happen, adding to an inaccurate and incomplete picture. Another result is Appalachians' suspicion of outsiders--they watch closely to see if a newcomer will like or dislike, make fun of or appreciate the area.

In my classes, I use three strategies to involve students in understanding stereotypes.

First, my students take a look at the above examples of how outsiders picture them and refute the images. We look at the grain of truth which all stereotypes contain, but look for the danger of generalizing to the total population. Why do people classify one another? Certainly it allows people to hold their way of acting, speaking, or writing as superior to others. Another response to being characterized one way or another is to become what outsiders believe them to be. Pikeville celebrates "Hillbilly Days" every April and everyone comes dressed in denim overhauls, corn-cob pipe, and moonshine jug. A last look at stereotypes recognizes that Appalachians also stereotype non-Appalachians. My daughter and son are going to New York City with their high school and the teachers are instilling all kinds of fear of muggings, jewel-snatchings, and other imagined atrocities. Since my children have traveled, they are excited about the trip, but some of their friends are more afraid than excited.

Secondly, my students and I proceed from the general stereotypes to specific times that they were ridiculed, maybe when they went to Michigan to visit their cousins or roomed with non-Appalachian students at the state university before they transferred back home. They write a journal entry about that time, looking at how they felt and how they handled it. We then connect that entry to feelings of other multicultural communities, and we talk about the concept that humans "can never be fully secure and possess good self-esteem as long as their sense of worth depends in part on maintaining the belief that they are better [or worse] than others" (Rosemond

96). We look at ways to counteract prejudices through awareness and knowledge, but begin by respecting our own culture (Montgomery).

Finally, we examine some of the positive attributes of this area suggested by prominent Kentucky folklorist Loyal Jones: modesty and humility, a strong sense of family, a sense of humor, personalism (relating to the personal as opposed to the abstract), and a love of place or rootedness (Speech). I have found his list particularly helpful in understanding my students. I add my observations that the mountain people have a strong religious orientation, an attribute which like any other can be both positive and negative.

B. LINGUISTICAL BACKGROUND

For me, the most exciting part of my teaching is explaining Appalachian English (AE) as researched by sociolinguists Walt Wolfram and Donna Christian who discovered that like Black English Vernacular (BEV), the Appalachian language "operates with its own set of consistent and explicable rules" (Daniels 163). For example, set replaces sit and set in AE, explained by Wolfram as verbs coalescing so there is no difference between past and present. Another feature is the pluralization of words that are plural in themselves, words like powders, gravels, deers, and K-Marts (to refer to one K-Mart). Pronunciation features include pronouncing the a at the end of a word as y; my neighbors always called my daughter Laura, Laury, and before I understood this feature, I always corrected them. Another feature is adding an r to words ending with open vowels for diphthongs as winder for window, and holler for hollow (we can always tell if you're from out of town by your pronunciation of that word, since we speak about the hollers or creeks we're from rather than town names)(Wolfram)

I also share with them the work of dialectologist Ravin McDavid who speaks about the linguistical groups that settled the area: Pennsylvania Dutch, German, French Huguenots, Scotch-Irish, Cherokee and other Native Americans. Native Kentuckian Cratis Williams gives credence to the musicality and strong metaphorical nature of the language and points to its Scotch-Irish heritage. Dr. Michael Montgomery, professor of linguistics at University of South Carolina, updates the information based on his recent studies in England, stating that AE is a blend of Scotch Irish, Southern British English, and General British English (quoted in Sohn 4).

After this lecture, students tell me about their own ancestry and bring in history of language in their families-vocabulary words or phrases and their definitions. They look words up in the American Dialect Dictionary and often find that words are not necessarily Appalachian in origin. This activity points to the fluidity of language.

With the aphorisms they bring in, I illustrate the power of metaphors. Anyone who has ever seen a coal bucket can't deny the appropriateness of "dumber than a coal bucket" to describe a stupid person. Another coal metaphor is "Joe Dan didn't know that guy from a load of coal," referring to a person's not recognizing another. I have occasionally had them write short essays explaining the meaning of other aphorisms like, "If her mind was lard, it wouldn't grease a good sized pan," or "He's so windy that he can blow up an onion sack full of holes,"(you're lying) or "His mouth runs faster than a bell clapper in a goose's ass." Having collected these sayings for ten years now, I find it interesting to see the references to stupidity, violence, gender, and race.

C. LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE

After examining the features of AE vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation, I tell the class what is stigmatized and what is not. I talk about errors related to dialect and those related to illiteracy. I do this with sensitivity, since I agree with Tilly Warnock that, "We want to acknowledge the different rhetorics that people bring into the university and work with them to be able to connect forms they are using in their lives and in languages they speak with academic discourse" (quoted in Mills 20). Like others in the multicultural community, our students are caught between two cultures. Unlike the others, my students have an unusually strong attachment to home.

As a class we discuss Jones's observation that Appalachian culture may "well be more traditional and backward looking...than mainstream culture [which] isn't exactly all [that] healthy"(Jones A1) He continues that our area shouldn't be judged by mainstream values of accumulation of wealth and power (A1). One of Jones's co-workers, Garry Barker thinks Appalachians should refuse assimilation and speaks about "a stubborn, dry-humored...other, a refusal to be homogenized into mainstream American, a culture of pickups, country music, and an almost perverse pride at

having survived the many noble efforts to properly civilize such a rowdy population" (F3). The ingredients in the stew pot should not lose their identity--onions do not become potatoes in the stew. Total assimilation, the route that many immigrants and some Appalachians choose in order to become successful, is one alternative, but not always a good one for my students whose main worry is "gettin' above their raisins." Will learning the language of the school and the business world alienate them from their family? Will they lose their sense of otherness?

As an alternative to complete assimilation, I discuss wearing a dress to church and jeans to McDonalds: we speak differently to the college president than we do to our friends. They can become "rhetorical power players," codeswitchers, learning to use language to benefit themselves in the most favorable way while not ignoring the political and educational realities that need to be changed (Villanueva 115). As we know from the research of Scribner and Cole and Shirley Brice Heath, there are various literacies with various purposes. Codeswitching will enable my students to use their home and school language to accomplish their purpose of maintaining their relationship with their family and learning the language of the academic community as well.

D. BUILDING UP CONFIDENCE

Having grown up in the South, an area also stigmatized because of accent and dialect different from the standard, and having lived in central Appalachia for 19 years, I can empathize with my students. Furious with people who seem to think that anyone born south of the Mason-Dixon line, especially a Southern woman, is ignorant, I want my students to stand up for themselves. They are bright, unique, and articulate people who have the energy to pursue their goals. While I encourage pride in their culture, I don't want them to feel stuck in the past. Nor do I want them to fall back on realizing their talents by buying into the "dumb hillbilly" stereotype or any other excuse.

Since so many come to my class underprepared for writing, I talk to them about all of us being writers of varying experience. I begin building confidence, speaking about the power within them to make a difference in their lives. Since we are a Christian college in a strongly Christian area, I challenge them to remember the words of Matthew: "You are the light of the world...set it on a stand

where it gives light to all in the house." I have to keep encouraging them throughout the semester, since so many want to believe that they just can't write..

I want them to see the power of writing to address some of their personal and community problems, to challenge the forces that might be holding this area back, to publicize the positive attributes of the area. This conscious use of language to tell their stories will enable my students to be ingredients in the stewpot which can both maintain their identity while adding to the juices of the multicultural community.

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RURAL WHITES: PART OF MULTICULTURALISM?

Discussions of multiculturalism and basic writing seem not to address rural white students entering the community college who are basic writers.

I have felt isolated within the professional community, seeming to have no theoretical or pedagogical references with which to consider the demands of my Appalachian students. Then I learned about Anthony Petrosky's current work with Appalachian students at the University of Pittsburgh, and I reconsidered his work with David Bartholomae: Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts. Did they gear their teaching methods to a mainly rural, white population, given their proximity to Appalachia? Victor Villanueva's "Considerations for American Frereistas," notes the similarities and differences between race and class. Appalachian students would, in many ways apart from skin color, fit within the areas of overlap Villanueva discusses. And studies in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, like those described by William Grabe in his annual Journal of Applied Linguistics, further suggest that Appalachian students have problems similar to people of color: a distinct dialect at great remove from the Standard and an essentially oral culture, both of which are subject to social stigma.

For this oral presentation, I would like to discuss the ways theoretical and pedagogical discussions on orality and literacy and on basic writers have seemingly failed to address a significant minority population within this nation--the rural white--particularly the rural white student I encounter in the college classroom. Moreover, I would like to present a teaching method geared specifically for that population. It draws on the work of Wolfram and Christian's Appalachian Speech as well as the work of Cratis Williams, Raven McDavid, Michael Montgomery, those mentioned above, and Gere and Smith. My teaching methods are perhaps best informed by eighteen years of living and ten years teaching composition in central Appalachia, an experience I would share: theory, pedagogy, and specific classroom applications.

My pedagogy centers on having students discover, develop, and commit to writing family oral histories. We also consider the entire notion of language and dialect as rule-governed, legitimate, and subjective, a part of their academic and personal lives. Additionally, students discover the ways of academic literacy, the ways in which that

literacy need not be monolithic. They discover that there is not only orality and literacy, different dialects of equal value, but various literacies. And within this context we look at the ways in which the richness of their dialect can inform, apply to, and change written discourse. With this experience, both students and teacher can then join the multicultural community with our heads held high.

To: Victor Villanueva

Northern Arizona University
English Department

From: Kathy Sohn

Re: 94 CCCC presentation

Date: January 12, 1994

Congratulations on Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color! Am ordering a copy today and look forward to reading it. The NCTE description is good.

I know you are a busy person, but I am beginning now to research background for my speech at 4C's and wonder if there is any possibility of getting the info requested in my October 26 letter? A copy of your "American Frefreistas" would be enough. Could fax it to 606 437-7513?

Thanks.

103 Honeysuckle Drive
Pikeville, KY 41501
January 12, 1994

Kermit E. Campbell
The University of Texas
Department of English
Austin, TX 78712-1164

Dear Dr. Campbell,

I am one of the speakers with you on the panel, "Academic and Vernacular Literacies: Politics and Pedagogy," at the March CCCC meeting in Nashville. You were listed as Speaker 2, and I wondered if you could share a copy of the program proposal you submitted to CCCC so that I could see how my material fits. I am taking the liberty of enclosing a copy of mine.

This is my second time speaking to CCCC; it is an expansive and energizing experience that takes me outside of my local arena where I tend to focus too intently.

I look forward to meeting you in Nashville on March 19 and to receiving a copy of your proposal.

103 Honeysuckle Drive
Pikeville, KY 41501
March 23, 1994

Ms. Jenny Williams
Department of English
Hazard Community College
Hazard, KY 41701

Dear Jenny,

I enjoyed meeting you at 4 C's in Nashville and hope your trip back was a good one. This particular conference has given me some new ideas for the classroom and maybe even motivated me to do some personal writing.

The interchanges during the question time in our session were especially stimulating. I am writing you to get a clearer picture of your questions about my speech. Because I was so nervous and so glad to have the paper finished, I was not prepared for any questions. In 1990 when I presented another 4 C's paper soon after I had earned my Masters in English, there were fewer people in the audience and no time for questions. I apologize for skirting over your questions, but hope you will understand my mental state.

Since I do plan to submit the paper to some journals and would like the paper to include all assenting and dissenting voices, I wanted to ask if you could respond in writing to the content of my paper (enclosed). Do you think that would be possible? Naturally I would give you credit in the article should it be published.

I can be reached at 437-6467 if you would prefer speaking about it over the phone. Unless I hear from you sooner, I will call in two weeks. Many thanks.

Sincerely,

Katherine K. Sohn